

## ' GLORIOUS WAR '

**W**AR has its apologists, defenders, and even glorifiers, however anomalous it may appear, among professed disciples of the Prince of Peace. Dwellers in lands untouched by the scourge have marshalled facts and expounded theories to justify its necessity and desirability. I have heard an armchair critic say that a 'good war' from time to time cleared the air, eased economic problems, gave a stimulus to industry, and was a blessing all round! How far removed from logical Christianity is such a view of men's relations to each other can be recognised by contrast with the attitude of the Father of Christendom, who never ceased calling on his children during the recent European war to abandon their abominable fratricide and compose their differences by peaceful arbitration. By no force of imagination can we represent the Founder of Christianity Himself as inciting to slaughter; and yet many who call themselves His followers deliberately encouraged revenge, and denied forgiveness to their prostrate enemies.

Protagonists of war are now mostly to be found among men who have not encountered it face to face; and again, societies have arisen to prevent its recurrence because it is felt that, while war is an indirect cause of noble and humane actions, it remains nevertheless an evil and a producer of evils. If order is heaven's first law, then war which means chaos is hellish in nature. The world's outlook after the recent 'splendid war,' which was to end war, does not augur well for future peace; but although the superficial Christians who undertook to regulate the world's affairs on an equitable basis are with us still, we are bound to be optimists, and believe we can checkmate them by spreading the truth of what we have seen and heard.

Here are a few experiences of war's effects on ordinary, law-abiding, non-combatants brought into con-

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tact with a hostile army and forced to submit to dictation. In addition to already existing hatred, the vices of lying, theft, envy, idleness, and others were habitually practised by people who had before held them in abhorrence; a changed mentality elevated them to the rank of virtues. The worst of war's exigencies was the moral transformation of subjugated citizens.

Overtaken by the enemy invasion of Serbia in 1915, the fugitives, crowded together in one small central town, prepared for their fate by circulating blood-curdling stories of what had occurred elsewhere. This was a form of patriotism open to all and indulged in without scruple. Some of the retreatants had called out as they left, warningly or tauntingly: 'Don't let yourselves be Germanised till we come back!' and we were determined that we would not deserve such a reproach. Conscientiously we fanned our hate, and got ready to do all we dared for the discomfiture of the invader. Already at the beginning of hostilities truth had been laid aside, and like the stories rife in London of German atrocities, nothing was too monstrous to be imagined and believed. Such is the force of insistent repetition, that against innate conviction and common sense one began to credit the enormities. To doubt was treason to one's own side. Silence was suspicious, and disclaimers were a proof of half-hearted adhesion to the national cause. In this connection even cruelty to our own was admissible, for it was rank cruelty to tell our wounded that the incoming troops would either massacre them or burn them alive.

The fiery patriots to whom we all turned for comfort in the desolation of defeat, stopped at nothing in their task of discrediting the enemy so as to keep alive the spirit of resistance. There must be no compromise, only a feigned submission with the fervid will to thwart, harry, deceive, annihilate so far as this could

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be done without risk. Thus, heart-broken at the retreat of the gallant Serbian Army, loathing the conquerors, we all took to calumny as our best weapon against him at the moment. Some invented, and the rest listened, forcing themselves to believe the wildest accusations, remaining silent when unconvinced. War was fast breeding hypocrites as well as liars. Duty to the land, to a seemingly lost cause, condoned everything. During the first days of the occupation the invaders' words and acts were distorted, misinterpreted, vilified. Not indeed that we lacked matter for complaint. Hardships of all kinds were upon us: rough treatment often of the villagers by the troops; requisition (with scant or no payment) of our most necessary household possessions; strict rules that limited communication with our fellows; above all, national humiliation.

These, however, the usual concomitants of war, did not suffice for our outraged mentality of war victims. Tales of injuries and exactions that could not bear investigation were repeated till they began to get credence. Fidelity to our absent men demanded that their foes should be defamed. Whoever dwelt on a humane action of the enemy was viewed with contempt and distrust. If *slay and spare not!* is the slogan of the actual fighters, *Lie and hesitate not!* would seem to be the watchword for non-combatants. To hang back meant secret connivance with the oppressor. Those of us who took a cowardly refuge in silence fared badly; but woe to whoever appeared to be on a footing of amity with the invader! Even children who accepted a gift or submitted to a caress from a passing soldier were beaten and hooted by their playmates. A woman was boycotted for directing a soldier fainting in the street to the hospital where he could obtain succour. Was she not a traitor to those whom, when recovered, he would arise to slay? Inhumanity, hatred, falsehood—

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these are inevitably engendered by 'Glorious War.' Qualms of conscience should be stifled, and we tried hard to rejoice at brutalities inflicted on our people, for these would hinder the alien forces from getting a friendly foothold in the country!

We were still far from the days when hunger's pang drew all sufferers closer together, and hate almost disappeared in the common misery. But as time went on, in spite of our attitude of irreconcilables, relations between conquerors and conquered became modified. Among the former were many of Slav origin, speaking the same language as the people, and frequently one with them in sentiment. Little services were rendered on both sides, and calmer acceptance of present conditions became evident. We learned to turn away our heads and ignore the fact when a figure in uniform stopped to exchange a word with a civilian, or to watch a group of youngsters at play. It no longer shocked us to remember that these men had children of their own far away, for whom their hearts yearned. Gradually tolerance succeeded to our first fierce resentment of their presence, knowing as we did that it could not last for ever—although an aureole still surrounded the heads of the indomitable haters who boasted (with more or less accuracy) that they had never held intercourse with the enemy, some going so far as to assert that they had not sullied their eyes by even once looking at them!

Our programme, nevertheless, was unchanged. When wounded men, healed in our hospital, escaped to the hills with the avowed intention of tearing up the railway lines at night in order to accomplish the destruction of troops going southwards, we could but admire and applaud. Yet on witnessing the departure of an enemy detachment, many of them mere boys, going unsuspectingly to a sudden doom, one could not repress shivers of remorse. One lay awake at night

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picturing the crash with its attendant horrors of maimed limbs and untimely deaths, the distant homes where return would be looked for in vain, and no effort could conjure up the sentiment of joy at the disaster that was right and proper in the circumstances. Similar outrages were being perpetrated, where possible, on our own troops, and the justice of retaliation could not be gainsaid. We goaded one another to ferocity, vied with one another in callousness. These are the war virtues, and are cultivated at the expense of what Christianity stands for. When we heard of a train wrecked and learned that the casualties were slight, we affected distress as if we would in reality have gloated over the shambles of our foes' bodies.

The foe had taken possession of our country. The country would not submit, and judged every means lawful to rid herself of the incubus. Who could decide whether a revolt would be successful? In remote villages isolated groups of soldiers foraging for food were seized and put to death. Fierce reprisals followed, for which revenge was sworn, and so the sickening cycle went on of murders and counter-murders, such as on a large scale are styled the 'magnificent art of war.' We were, in fact, at war, we told ourselves, with the wrongful occupants of the land. The word of a mayor in some adjacent town did not bind all the district. To lessen the power of the enemy by lessening its numbers was a duty to the race. Such were the arguments of the peasants to those 'cravens' amongst us who counselled patience, passivity, and present submission. Certainly the rule of the conqueror pressed heavily on us. We saw peaceful, honest, law-abiding tradesmen, elderly professors, priests of the Orthodox State Church, all men who had elected to remain in the land rather than abandon home, family, the hardly-acquired savings of a lifetime, or duty to a parish, driven along the streets like bands of criminals, housed

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in damp cellars when the jails were full, and subjected to lengthy interrogations. It was to be expected, and in like conditions our own troops would and did act similarly; but we were in no mood to remember this.

Among the invaders were the usual contrasts of humanity. Some were gentlemen and some were ruffians. In one place prisoners were treated courteously, and after a swift cross-examination allowed to return to their homes, or else told to prepare for deportation to Hungary; in another they were vexatiously detained for days, their possessions confiscated, their houses plundered, their womenfolk forced to cook for and wait on the officers quartered in the best rooms, while they themselves were relegated to an attic or stable. In one case a lady was accused of putting poison in the food merely because she had refused to play the piano for her unwelcome lodgers' delectation. The military judge gave her every satisfaction and reprimanded as well as removed her accusers for their 'unworthy suspicions.'

Surely if lies were ever permissible it was now, when inoffensive crowds were lined up like malefactors and led one by one to a room in the public inn where sat the Court Martial. Everything of course depended on the mentality of the individual, 'dressed in a little brief authority.' Those who could prove they were past the military age (and who could blame those who added to their years?) and those who suffered from grave disease were lucky. Every physical defect was an asset. The day of the decrepit, maimed, blind, or mentally imperfect had now come. The men found 'dangerous' were arranged in batches to be marched off for internment, which meant slow starvation. The partings were heart-rending, and I have seen enemies by whose orders they were carried out turn aside to hide their own emotion. For days the prisoners—poor victims, whose only crime was that they were

Serbs, and therefore could not be trusted—were kept huddled together in an impromptu jail, hoping against hope, dreaming of the miraculous return of the Serbian Army to deliver them before they were expedited to Austria-Hungary. These hopes, being whispered until we began to believe them possible, came to the ears of our masters, who warned us that, at the first approach of any hostile troops, all the prisoners would be executed!

When the day of deportation arrived, we gathered round the pilgrims to say farewell, bringing what comforts of food and clothing we could spare. A bribe sometimes made one of the escort look another way while there was a bold attempt at evasion. But recalcitrants were hunted out of their hiding-places like rats. When a convoy had left—'funeral of the living' we called it—a mournful peace settled on the town. Those who had been spared breathed freely and set about their business. Not for long, however. After a period of respite, the same process began of raid, interrogatory, confinement, and release or deportation. Men were sometimes stopped in the street and carried off without being allowed to inform their relations. Houses were suddenly searched, and in one instance a child absent on an errand returned home to find the other members of the family had disappeared.

Compelled by the spirit of war to belittle good and magnify evil, we deplored the appointment of Count Salis-Seewis, a humane, deeply religious man, as Governor-General of Serbia. He was fair-minded and also well-disposed towards the population, and it was feared that his popularity might pave the way to an understanding fatal to the national cause. Fortunately said the determined patriots, he was soon recalled to Vienna, and replaced by Baron Rhemen von Barenfeld, who certainly did not err on the side of leniency. Rhemen's attitude and general behaviour left nothing

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to be desired with regard to enkindling afresh our resentment and abhorrence of alien government.

It is true that, whatever our wrongs, our brethren under Bulgarian rule were immeasurably worse off. They were frequently summoned and indiscriminately whipped for no visible reason beyond their nationality. So long as the German troops shared the duties of the occupation in South-Eastern Serbia, redress and protection could be obtained; but on their withdrawal—for they were ever being sent to the front where fighting was hottest—the hapless inhabitants of Macedonia and Old Serbia were entirely at the mercy of their savage enemies. Women with infants in arms were pursued by stray bands of Bulgar soldiery and lashed with whips when not shot down for ‘having given birth to another Serbian dog when the race had to be exterminated.’

This paper has dealt with the demoralisation of the conquered, but perhaps a better theme would be the demoralisation of the conquerors in war. The Bulgars had been humiliated in the Balkan Wars of 1912—1913 by Serbia’s victories. They still smarted from defeat and revenged themselves by making the Serbs writhe in realisation of their present downfall. Children were the chief sufferers. They were made to deny their nationality, forced to sing doggerel verses against the Serbian Army commanders who had hitherto been their ideals of heroism and virtue. Their ‘immortal Serbia,’ they were told, was dead, and at school they were taught a new Sign of the Cross, which consisted in making as usual the sacred symbol, but repeating: ‘My father was a Bulgar, my mother was a Bulgar, we are all Bulgars for evermore! Amen.’

Many of these little martyrs died of bewilderment and remorse after having thus denied their allegiance and origin. Some lost their reason, and some committed suicide. Indeed suicide is a not uncommon



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accompaniment of war conditions. It was endemic even in the Austrian districts after the shock of the Serbian retreat. Women who found themselves suddenly cut off from contact with their menfolk and faced with the problem of existence took refuge in death.

Familiarity with crime breeds indifference, and we gradually became callous to the worst outrages. Cowardice and callousness are inseparable from war conditions. Cowardice is allied to treason. Because Serbian citizens alone were liable to internment, numbers of Serbian Jews—and also some others—declared themselves of Turkish or Bulgarian nationality. They dwelt undisturbed in their homes, exposed to the execrations of their neighbours, until the day came which they had not foreseen, and Bulgarian and Turkish emissaries arrived to conscript them. They had made a fatal mistake in renouncing allegiance to Serbia, for an internment camp in Hungary was always preferable to hard labour and often death in Thrace or Asia Minor. Moreover, the families they left behind had to bear contempt and ignominy.

Again, cowardice begot spies, for hitherto respectable members of society saw no other means of self-preservation. The number of spies in Serbia during the occupation seems to have been much less in proportion than in Belgium or France, but we all knew that immunity from arrest and deportation was conferred on men and women who frequented our reunions in the guise of sympathisers with the Entente, and reported what they heard. Mutual suspicion arose, and there were painful accusations and recriminations. The limits of deceit were clearly defined. It was an unpardonable sin when practised on ourselves; it was a virtue when practised on the invaders. And, as we have already seen, the downward path was easy. What was awkwardly and haltingly done at first soon became

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a matter of course. Thus, a member of our mission, noted for frankness and absolute truthfulness, after trying to avoid the occasions of sin, parted with her last scruple and could be overheard glibly persuading the medical inspector that a small, blond patient with bandaged head in a corner of her ward was identical with the tall, dark man he saw yesterday in the same bed. And as the confused, over-worked doctor passed wearily on, accepting her statement, we made signs congratulating her on her proficiency in cheating, in smuggling sound men from the hospital who could harry and thwart the invader.

The saddest part of it all was that children were praised for lying if it was a question of misleading or baffling the enemy. What will be the effect of this permitted lapse of youth to perversity? Those who had hitherto inculcated morality now condoned immorality. Previous codes were cancelled, for our neighbours, the enemy, were put outside all consideration. Had he not taken our country from us, to which he had no rightful claim?

Education, of course, suffered by the prolonged state of war, and literature and art were no more. Admirable attempts were made by the invaders to provide schools and carry on in all branches the instruction of youth, but the obstacles were insuperable. Sloth infested alike the ranks of conquerors and conquered. The former imposed forced labour on the latter, who naturally tried to escape it by trickery. Nobody worked who was not compelled to do so. A member of the American Relief Mission which was allowed to visit the country in 1916 remarked to me that he was shocked at the improvidence and apathy of the people in the face of approaching famine. 'I wonder,' he said, 'that the war has taught them nothing!' But it was war, repeated war, that taught them the futility of toil and thrift! Women known as per-

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fect housekeepers in other days could not be persuaded to prepare the usual fruit electuaries, pickled vegetables, and tomato juice for the coming winter. Their last supplies had been confiscated, and they were too disheartened to take fresh risks. Living from hand to mouth seemed the best philosophy. This was war's lesson. The peasants, in spite of military supervision, produced only small crops, knowing that every surplus was for the enemy's benefit. Habits of laziness took root that probably still survive.

Detestable, too, was the spirit of destruction that took possession of us. Children, sent to gather fruit, of which Serbia has great variety and abundance, eluded the vigilance of their task-masters and poured half the contents of their baskets into the stream. For this they were commended by their parents, since the fruit was probably destined to make marmalade for the enemy troops. The requisition of textiles and wool caused house-wives to extract the wool filling from their mattresses, and sink it, a stone attached, in the river. Wreckage, violence, deceit, indolence—every social evil and every material misery were with us as the natural outcome of war.

To sum up : the Christian code was suspended and both sides became corrupt. Triumph made transgressors of the victors, exciting many of them to play the rôle of the superman, giving to the brutal and callous among them free scope for indulgence of their base passions. Defeat was a still greater misfortune for the vanquished, whose only retaliatory weapons were of an abject and poisonous nature eating like a canker into once honest and honourable souls. No matter how it is conducted—and there is little or no resentment in Serbia to-day against her German antagonists of yesterday—whatever virtues it incidentally evokes, war remains a curse to all who have experienced its results at close quarters.

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